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ABSTRACT

An historical review reveals that dance in education has gained increasing recognition and credibility throughout America during the past 60 years. Introduced as a small part of the physical education activity program during the 1920s and 1930s, it has expanded and matured to become an essential component of many early childhood and elementary education programs. Its emergence as an integral part of a child's educational experience is a recent phenomenon, but the foundation for its introduction began with the work of Gertrude Colby and Bird Larson in the early 1920s. Historical factors and trends have placed dance education in a dynamic, ever-changing position, often resulting in confusion and uncertainty about its role in the cognitive, physical, and emotional development of the child. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s, however, have reflected continued growth, expansion, and clarification related to dance and the child. The decade of the 1980s once again pauses on the threshold of new frontiers. Understanding the role of early dance education will offer a significant contribution to the 1980s in the form of a humanistic, creative, and revitalized expansion of the movement world for the young child. (Author/RH)

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THE HISTORY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, CREATIVE MOVEMENT AND DANCE: THE PAST SPEAKS TO THE FUTURE

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DANCE IN EDUCATION

1920-1980

Dance in education has gained increasing recognition and credibility throughout America during the past sixty years. Introduced as a small part of the activity program within physical education during the 1920's and 1930's, it has expanded and matured to become an essential component of many early childhood and elementary education programs. Its emergence as an integral part of a child's educational experience is a recent phenomenon, but the foundation for its introduction began with the work of Gertrude Colby and Bird Larson in the early 1920's. Historical factors and trends have placed dance education in a dynamic, ever-changing position, often resulting in confusion and uncertainty about its role in the cognitive, physical, and emotional development of the child. Understanding the role of early dance education will offer a significant contribution to the decade of the 1980's - a humanistic, creative, and revitalized expansion of the movement world for the young child.

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The decades between 1920 and 1980 have experienced a transformation from rigid authoritarian systems of movement into forms and processes which heighten the child's learning experiences at all levels of human interaction.

The pioneer work of Colby and Larson, at Columbia University, under the direction and guidance of Dr. Luther Gulick and John Dewey, the clarification of goals and techniques accomplished by Margaret H'Doubler at the University of Wisconsin, the conceptualization of dance education for the young child by Gladys Andrews Fleming and Ruth Murray, the theoretical movement frameworks offered through the vision of Rudolf Laban, and the work of dance educators including Virginia Tanner, Barbara Mettler, and Bruce King - all are recognized as creative and forceful action within the field of dance in education.

The renewed interest in education during the early 1900's embraced all aspects of the curriculum, including that of movement. In an effort to structure physical education programs, specific systems of movement which had been developed during the 1800's continued to be promoted by physical education. Two movement systems which were used extensively in the United States were

Swedish and German gymnastics, highly formalized and directed, providing definite sequences and progressions to be followed, and providing little opportunity for creative development on the part of the child.

It was into this environment that the movement form envisioned by Gertrude Colby was first introduced. Natural Dance encouraged the child's creativity and spontaneity, while developing an appreciation of music and dance as life-long opportunities for communication and self-expression.

One of the persons who studied with Colby at Columbia's Speyer Demonstration School during the years of experimentation and who in turn became a leading figure in the growth of dance in education was Bird Larson. After working with natural and expressive movement for children she revised the program and termed it "Natural Rhythmic Expression." One significant difference in the work of Larson was her interest in providing a solid foundation of body control as well. She believed that only after strong physical development occurred would it be possible for children to translate their ideas into expressive physical form. She had a background in corrective physical education and based her movement techniques on anatomy, kinesilolgy, and physiology. Through her work, Larson extended the ideas of Colby into a more developmental approach to movement.

The early 1930's were heralded by the end of the Depression, and more widespread inquiry into the status and changing role of education, the child, and dance education began. The emphasis in physical education had shifted from drills and calisthenics to include activities which had carry-over value into the recreational and social aspects of the child's life. The terms "child-centered", "the whole child", "opportunities for creative expression", and "skill learning" were used with ever-increasing frequency. In 1931 Lucile Marsh suggested more modern approaches to teaching movement. First, children were to become the recipients of creative teaching instead of being drilled in routines. Opportunities were to be provided for children to dance their own interests rather than the movements of adults. When specific dances were taught, they must be developed from thought and feeling. Only those movements which create happy, gracious feelings were to be presented to the children. And finally, the teacher was to guide children to movements which were truthful, beautiful, and enjoyable. She optimistically wrote: "The question is no longer "Should we send out children to dancing school? Now, we take for granted that dancing is an essential part of modern education". In 1939 Beatrice Richardson wrote: ". . . the teacher must begin with what the child has and is, not with what

she has and is."

Olive Horrigan encouraged that rhythmic activities be explored in the classroom and on the playground, that creative activities dealing with self-expression and idea interpretation be probed, that children's poems be used as dramatic stimulus for interpretive movement and rhythms, and that games and dances of other countries be studied.

By 1940 there were encouraging signs that physical education had gained increased support within the total educational framework. McCloy wrote that it was necessary for educational leaders to consider physical education as one of the most important activities within the schools. It must be thought of as a fundamental rather than a "frill". The consideration of movement as an integral, valuable aspect of education represented a startling change in thought since the early years of the Twentieth Century. The need for trained personnel who could teach skills correctly and provide interesting programs was recognized. Physical educators were now expected to have a greater range of knowledge; not only were they expected to have adequate training in skills, but also to possess a background in the biological, psychological, and educational sciences. The days of rote, systematized teaching had passed. The movement teacher was expected to evaluate the children on ability and individual differences; the programs taught were to be adapted to the child. No longer were the mind and body to be separated. Rosalind Cassidy wrote that physical education and general education now shared the same goal - to develop the individual as fully as possible for self and for society.

It remained imperative that a dance pedagogy be developed; only then would it be possible to propose teaching methods for dance which would evidence a consistency of philosophy and approach which could be introduced throughout the country. In 1941 Joyce Mitchell wrote: ". . . . does art have value in education, and if so, what specific branches of this special activity have relative and absolute value? Does the dance, for example, possess the qualifications which would enable education to call it valuable to the modern system of education? Has the dance so communicated itself that education might profit from an association with its meanings and portents?". No longer was dance standing on the outside looking; it had gained entrance through physical education and it claimed an important role in the total education of the child. The task ahead was to establish the place of dance in education even more firmly.

During the 1940's events in England heightened those occurring in the United States. McIntosh wrote that the term movement and a number of phrases which movement (such as the art of movement, movement training, and movement education) came to be used more and more in place of dance, as those who championed the new cause extended the scope of their claims upon physical education. In 1946 the chief medical officer of the British Ministry of Education supported and recommended the value of movement and encouraged the development of feeling and understanding for it.

The leader of the new "movement movement" in England was Lisa Ullmann, former student and colleague of Rudolf Laban. It was through her untiring efforts that the work of Laban became known and respected throughout England and through whom much of his work impacted the United States. In the preface to Modern Educational Dance Laban wrote that the book had been devised both for teachers and parents. He explained that the first term used for this form of movement had been free dance, and that when the form spread to many European countries it became known as Central-European Dance. The next term used was modern dance, which after the publication of his book became known as modern educational dance in England. Educational dance and movement education referred to similar concepts of movement, dance, and education which, when integrated by English educational authorities, emerged as movement education. It was that term which was brought to America by returning educators during the years between 1955 and 1958.

One impact on American life during the 1950's was the great cultural explosion which had begun following the Second World War and which increased during the next decade.

The consideration of the needs of the child which had developed greater support among physical educators during that decade had also permeated the field of dance in education. Dance as a medium for education was an emerging philosophy as the 1950's began. Bernice Wolfson expressed the goals of dance in education as an "understanding" of "the students and the students' needs", and to use "dance to help students learn to work effectively and constructively... independently and in groups."

American educators observed British teachers use methods of exploration, discovery, and problem-solving. The breakdown of traditional approaches to teaching movement was viewed with favor, as was the opportunity provided for

children to express themselves freely. The integration of movement with other areas of the curriculum, the encouragement of creativity, and the development of an aesthetic awareness became valued goals of movement educational programs.

The approaches to movement which were shared with American teachers during those years were based on Laban's theories of movement. From that firm foundation of movement understanding methodologies were derived. Problem-solving and exploration emerged as the dominant modes of teaching. A problem was presented by the teacher which each child solved freely and individually using movement experimentation and invention. The child questioned and learned about his own movement behaviors, strengths, and problems, and discovered patterns of movement which would improve movement ability. This approach included opportunities for the child to discover answers through unique, individual movement rather than through imitation; it freed him from anxiety if he worked slower than others because each child worked at an individual rate; he had many experiences in imaginative thinking; and he moved without self-consciousness, because he was totally absorbed in solving movement problems.

The introduction of movement education into the United States occurred through the work of the American educators who studied in England and who returned to spread the knowledge and insights they had gained through their experiences at the Laban Art of Movement Studio and the schools supported by the British Ministry of Education. The concepts of movement education were consistent with the expressed values of progressive education, and the revised perceptions of the society, education, the child, movement, and dance provided exciting challenges for the educators of the 1960's.

The decades of the 1960's and 1970's reflect continued growth, expansion, and clarification related to dance and the child. The ever expanding numbers of dance major programs in higher education offered many opportunities for persons interested in early childhood and elementary education to study with movement specialists on their own compuses, to probe integrations between the fields of education and movement in ways that no longer upheld a separation of mind and body. The young child moving in personal and unique ways, exploring the space, time, and dynamic energy which is part of his internal and external world began to be recognized as a foundational aspect of early

learning experiences.

The decade of the 1980's once again pauses on the threshold of new frontiers. The initial excitement and motivation of the previous two decades has been replaced by seasoned determination and optimistic vision that dance experiences for the child will become a part of the core of learning. None of this will happen quickly or easily; many barriers must yet be crossed, and redefinitions and refinements remain on the horizon.

Children's Dance, Dance for Children, Creative Movement, Creative Dance, Movement Exploration, Movement Education - these and many other terms are used to describe various approaches to the child's experience inside the art of movement. The philosophies represented in literature, workshops, courses, classrooms, and commercial studios vary from an anything-goes-approach to an attitude more reflective of early nineteenth century than late twentieth century thought.

How does a classroom teacher make sense out of the magazine articles which present dance as a series of ready-get set-go challenges?

How does a physical educator provide meaningful dance experiences with a knowledge of the field frequently limited to a course or two in college, usually beginning modern dance and folk dance? How does that same teacher provide support for dance experiences which relate the child to movement in ways different than sport skill?

How do administrators provide opportunities for cultural enrichment programs which include dance at a time when budgets continue to be reduced, when the classic concept of reading/writing/arithmetic once again rears its head, often uncreatively? How do those same administrators discover dance as an art form, one which has value in the total arts curriculum, one which heightens the child's learning experiences in ways different than (though not necessarily in exclusion of) the physical education program?

How does the movement/dance specialist penetrate the system? How does a primarily uncertified, often unrecognized discipline invade new and unprepared territory? How does that person make an impact if entrance is gained? How does that person manage facilities, dubious colleagues, and disinterested parents?

The myriad of elements which affect the child's learning are too numerous to mention - yet the recognition of the diversity must occur. Too often we have been unware of the population on whom we wish to cause an impact; we have depended on one-shot workshops, on isolated performances, and on short articles in

specialized magazines to communicate a vital, challenging, and as yet often unrefined approach to the child, the child's traditional learning experiences, and the child's exposure to the art of movement.

Often, too, we operate within vacuums - we feel that we are "alone in the fight" and we expend tremendous amounts of energy in frustration, in isolation, and in feeling that we are unappreciated and de-valued. On the other hand, we frequently have failed to express ourselves clearly enough in relation to currently operating systems - we value the discipline of dance and we value the the potential of dance in the child's life experiences - we have lacked effective means for the communication of our ideas, and we have lacked a combined sense of energy and resources to reach the huge population which is part of the process for change.

The forums from which we speak are as diverse as the populations for whom we speak. The powerful, yet uncollected, voices are similar to pebbles thrown into an ocean; if enough pebbles over a long enough period of time were to be thrown, change would occur. But that would take many more years than exist in one professional lifetime.

The following questions arise:

- How can we clarify what we have to say?
- How can we communicate our ideas to each other? And to the world which we want to enter?
- How can we cultivate an expanded and better informed public?
- How can we create - workshops, courses, performances, and literature which are reflective of our particular point of view?
- How can we credentialize ourselves so that we can live inside the educational environment as legitimate citizens?

All of us share some interest in the idea of movement for the young child or we would not be here today. Each of us has different ideas, philosophies, experiences, working environments. None of us has the luxury of extra time extra money, extra resources.

I ask you to consider your particular interests, talents, and commitment to affect a significant change - to transform isolated action and reaction into a process which has the potential for growth and expansion, and which does not "use-up" the creative energies of the teacher and the child. Let us work together to move forward into a decade of creative process, not creative chaos, continuing to nurture and support dance as a vital avenue toward achievement of individual potential and toward the acceptance of dance as a valid part of every program for the young child.